

# UPEI marches on Province House

By Peter Gillis

On Wednesday, November 12, UPEI students marked the opening of the fall legislature with a march on Province House. Over fifty students braved cold winds to protest the provincial governments cuts to higher education.

"The purpose of today's march is basically to get a commitment from our provincial government in regards to funding for our university," explained UPEI Student Union President Janice Broderick. "I think it is almost a safety feature that we need to be down there today on the opening and tell them we're still here -- we're still going to school."

The rally started early in the morning when members of the Student Union handed out coffee to students in line for pre-registration. The coffee-break was designed to increase awareness of the march at a time when many students were feeling some direct effects of current fiscal policies. Pre-registration is often a long and cold experience for students trying to enter necessary or popular courses that have been reduced due to administrative cutbacks.

The provincial government is currently in the first year of a three-year plan to cut

funding to UPEI. This year had a six percent reduction in funding. Next year will see a further four percent reduction, and the third year a possible stop in cuts. The government's fiscal policies have already led to a \$230 increase in tuition.

"In my opinion there is no current policy for higher education with this provincial government. They don't seem to think our university is important," stated Stephen Ramsay, UPEI SU Vice President Finance.

At 12:30pm, 50 students gathered at the gazebo to start the march. Joining them were Herb Dickieson, PEI's lone MLA from the New Democratic Party, and Leo Broderick, NDP candidate.

Working their way down University Avenue, students chanted slogans like "Education is falling down" and "Stop the cuts". Many passerbys in cars honked their horns to support UPEI's protest. As they continued, the group picked up more people, including some members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

Students arrived at Province House around 1:15pm. There, they listened to speeches from the student union president, the Minister of Education, and other politicians. The protest even attracted Premier Binns, who gave a surprise talk before entering the House. Media coverage was high for the event, and student enthusiasm

more than made up for the small numbers.

Some students were upset with the lack of attendance. It was felt that the weather and pre-registration affected the turn-out. Others talked of student apathy. One student explained, "If no one is going to show up, then they

don't have the right to complain about tuition going up."

Members of Council, though, felt that the march was a first step in combating current student attitudes. "I think it's going to solve awareness. What we intend to say is 'Look at all the students who are here today. We are all voters.

We're concerned and that should make you, the politicians, concerned'."

A second march on Province House is planned for late January. It will be organized by PEI chapter members of the Canadian Federation of Students.

